

What A Life

1 John 1:1-4

Introduction

1. Christianity stands or falls on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The options as to who He was and what He did can be reduced to 4:
 - 1) Liar – He was not who He said He was and He knew it.
 - 2) Lunatic – He was not who He thought He was and He did not know it.
 - 3) Legend – He was not who others later imagined Him to be.
 - 4) Lord – He was who He said He was and His life, death and resurrection proves it to be so.
2. Interest in Jesus is at an all time high. In July 1997 missions researcher David Barrett reported that world wide 65,571 books had been written about Jesus with an average of 4 new books coming out every single day. If his data is accurate, by July 2002 right at 73,000 books will have been written about Jesus. And yet this “global explosion” in books about Jesus has not resulted in a more accurate understanding of Jesus. Indeed it appears that there is greater confusion, misunderstanding and inaccuracies than ever before. Listen to the following judgments:

(The first three are a synopsis of views from *Life Magazine*, Vol. 17, Dec. 1994, 67-87)

- 1) “I don’t think we know who Jesus was. The Gospels, which were written for political purposes – to convert people – are after the fact. Fifty years at least. Mary? Well, obviously he had a mother, so it had to be somebody – her name doesn’t matter. Then one Gospel writer says he was born in Nazareth, the other says Bethlehem. Joseph might have been a shoemaker, not a carpenter. Some traditions said Jesus had brothers, others said Joseph had no other children. What difference does it make? The Gospel writers were novelists ... I realize much of what we know about Jesus is novelistic. But I act as if it isn’t.”

Peter A. Bien, Professor of English at Dartmouth College, translator of Nikos Kazantzakis’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

- 2) “Jesus, to succeed, *had* to choose martyrdom. He had been a failure in all sorts of human enterprises. One was to convert everybody to love, to turning the other cheek. He was an abysmal failure at that. He was also a failure in his more militant role – scourging the moneylenders, and so forth. He changed nothing. So, basically, the only power he had at the end was the power of abdication. It’s very, very important that Jesus chooses to die. That he *wants* to die. He links with this universal process – pure spirit, God – rather than try to resist it or pretend it does not exist. By abdicating, he paradoxically achieves a most spectacular success... By willing his own crucifixion, with Judas’s help, he brings into the service of good the most horrendous of the devil’s instruments, death itself. All who came after him would see what had happened, and would know what the lesson is.”

Peter A. Bien

- 3) “There was no such person in the history of the world as Jesus Christ. There was no historical, living breathing, sentient human being by that name. Ever. [The Bible] is a fictional, nonhistorical narrative. The myth is good for business.”

Jon Murray, Former President of American Atheists (deceased)

“We can no longer take the statements about the resurrection of Jesus literally. So let us say quite specifically: the tomb of Jesus was not empty but full, and his body did not disappear, but rotted away.”

Gerd Ludemann, German theologian, in *What Really Happened to Jesus* (1995).

“I don’t believe Jesus was God, but I’m no theologian. I don’t believe Jesus is the only way to God. I don’t believe he rose from the dead as scientific fact. I don’t know whether these things happened. It’s an irrelevant question.”

Bill Phipps, elected moderator, United Church of Canada (quoted in *World*, March 7, 1998, p. 18).

“In conclusion, what is the historicity of the burial account? From Roman expectations, the body of Jesus and of others crucified with him would have been left on the cross as a carrion for the crows and the dogs.”

John Dominic Crosson, *Who Killed Jesus?*, HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1995.

3. Yes, we are confronted with inaccuracies, confusion and blatant denial of Jesus in our day, but then so was John in his. In response John begins his 1st epistle to “set the record straight” about Jesus and to show us a life like no other life that has ever lived.
4. The apostle John, the son of Zebedee, wrote 5 of our New Testament books:
 - The gospel of John to convert sinners.
 - The epistles of John to confirm the saints.
 - The Revelation of John to coronate the Savior,

Or to say it another way:

 - The gospel for salvation → saved from sin’s penalty.
 - The epistles for sanctification → saved from sin’s power.
 - The Revelation for glorification → saved from sin’s presence.
5. John always gives us his purpose for writing. In the gospel of John, the key is hidden at the end (John 20:31). In Revelation, the key is deposited at the beginning (Rev. 1:19). 1 John, however, has several keys scattered throughout its pages. In this letter, written from Ephesus c. AD 80-95 to churches in and around Ephesus (Asia Minor), John gives us 4 interpretive keys that help us unlock the 5 chapters and 105 verses of this much loved letter.

- 1) To promote true joy in the child of God, satisfaction (1:4).
- 2) To prevent the child of God from sinning, sanctification (2:1).
- 3) To protect the child of God from false teachers, safety (2:26).
- 4) To provide assurance of salvation for the child of God, security (5:13).

Revolving or orbiting about these 4 keys are the themes of belief in Jesus, obedience to God's commands and love for one another. By these avenues John does not provide tests of life (Law) or tests of fellowship (Hodges), but tests of assurance. Thus 5:13 serves as the overarching purpose statement but not the exclusive one. It parallels remarkably the purpose statement of the Gospel of John 20:31. *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

Hence the Gospel was written that we might have eternal life, 1 John that we might know we have eternal life. It is possible to have it and not know it and John wants to clear that up. Belief, obedience and love are an essential trio for clearing our minds and settling our hearts.

Transition

1:1-4 constitutes the prologue or introduction to this general epistle, a book that does not refer to a single individual acquaintance of John. In these verses John puts before us 3 great truths about Jesus and in so doing says, "Look! What A Life!"

I. Examine the Word of Life. 1:1-2

This is one of 4 marvelous beginnings in the Bible.

- 1) Gen. 1:1 – Of Creation
- 2) Mark 1:1 – Of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God
- 3) John 1:1 – The God who is before the beginning
- 4) 1 John 1:1 – The beginning of the incarnate Son and the message about Him

Here the emphasis and focus is on the incarnate Son and the gospel message about Him. Four times the word "which" occurs in verse 1 allowing John to draw attention equally to the Word as a person and the Word proclaimed, to the Word of life that was revealed and made known and "declared" (the main verb not appearing until verse 3).

Transition

In beautiful balance two aspects of our Lord's person are addressed.

1. He is eternal in His deity. 1:1

The Word of Life who was manifested and then declared was "from the beginning," has life in Himself from eternity.

He was before the beginning.

He was in the beginning.

He is from the beginning.

He will be after the beginning.

Contra the ancient heretic Arius who was condemned at the Council of Nicea in AD 325, "There never was a time when He was not." As Jesus Himself boldly

declared in John 8:58, making a connection with Exodus 3:14, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” Joining this simple declaration with texts like John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:6-8; Col. 1:15-20 and Heb. 1:1-3, Scripture declares the Word of Life to be co-eternal, co-existent, co-equal and consubstantial with the Father.

*Whatever it is that makes God, God, the Son is all of that in its fullness and He always has been.

*Geoffrey Fieger, attorney for suicide doctor Jack Kevorkian and democratic nominee for Michigan governor, (*New York Times*, quoted in Baptist Press, 8-10-98) is off course when he says,

“In 2,000 years we’ve probably made somebody who is the equivalent of Elvis into God, so I see no reason why not to believe that in 2,000 years Elvis will be God. Probably if we went back 2,000 years ago and they said, you know, we think Jesus is God, and Jesus is just some goofball that got nailed to the cross.”

No, John says He is eternal in His deity. He is from the beginning. There never was a time when He was not and there will never be a time when He will not be!

2. **He is historical in His humanity. 1:1-2**

- John now begins a rigorous defense of the real and genuine humanity of Jesus. The message they had received at the beginning of their Christian experience was still the same. Nothing had changed and nothing should change. Unlike the false teachers of the gospel of John, and the false teachers of our day who deny the deity of the Son, the false teachers of 1 John denied the humanity of the Son. The false teachers were the “New Agers” of the early Church. We know them by the terms “docetists” and “Gnostics.”

Gnosticism: 1) matter is evil (or inferior)

2) salvation is by (mystical) knowledge

These religious “know-it-alls” rejected the doctrine of the incarnation. Some said He was a phantom or ghost who only appeared to have a body (docetist). John refutes them here in 1:1-4. Others said the mystical Christ-Spirit came upon and empowered the man Jesus at His baptism, but departed from Him prior to His crucifixion (Cerenthus). John will refute these in 5:6-12.

- John will make crystal clear to the skeptics of his day and ours that Jesus of Nazareth was not:
 - Make believe or mythical
 - Fairy tale or fantasy
 - Fable or fiction
 - Ghost or an illusion
- He, the Son of God, the one which was from the beginning was historical in His humanity.

Four lines of evidence are set forth.

a) **They heard Him with their ears. 1:1**

Heard – (WAR) repeated in verse 3 for emp. – we actually heard Him and His words are still ringing in our ears.

b) They saw Him with their eyes. 1:1-2

Have seen – (WAR) repeated in verses 2 & 3 for extra emp. – we actually saw Him and the beauty of that seeing is still with us.

Looked upon – (*theaomai*), related to our word theater. It expresses a calm, intentional and continuous contemplation of the object it is gazing upon. For 3 years John and the apostles gazed upon Jesus. They saw Him, they watched His every move.

c) They touched Him with their hands.

Our hands have handled – they physically touched Him and found Him to be real flesh and blood. No ghost, no phantom. This is an unusual phrase, but it makes good sense against the backdrop of the Gnostic-like heresy John was confronting.

d) They shared Him with their mouths. 1:2

The Word of Life – the Word who has life residing in Himself and who gives Life to all who come to Him in faith, this life was manifested (*NIV*, “appeared”), was truly and genuinely revealed in history, in time and space. God came down, the Word became flesh, and we heard Him, saw Him, touched Him and now, we bear witness (*NIV*, “testify,” Gr. *marturoumen*) continually (pre. tense) and declare (*NIV*, proclaim) continually (pre. tense) to you that “life, the eternal” which was with the Father and manifested (repeated for emp. to us). This is the testimony of personal experience. This is not second-hand or rumor. The apostles are telling us what they heard and saw themselves. They were eyewitnesses, eyewitnesses of His life, His death, His resurrection and His ascension.

It is absolutely essential that you get it right about Jesus. If you are right here you will be right in almost every other place of your theology. If you are wrong here, you will be wrong everywhere.

Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is not ½ God and ½ man, all God and no man, or all man and no God. He is not simply one in touch with God or one in touch with man. He is the **God-man!

**He is like no one else and no one else will ever be like Him. He was always with the Father and at Bethlehem He came to be with us. As John 1:14 teaches us, “The Word became flesh...”

Illustration

Benjamin Franklin on Jesus

“You desire to know something of my Religion ... Here is my Creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable Service we render to him is doing good to his other Children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another Life respecting its Conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental Principles of all sound Religion ... As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, the best the World ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting Changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to his Divinity; tho’ **it is a question I do not dogmatize upon having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now,** when I expect soon an Opportunity of knowing the Truth with less Trouble. I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that Belief has the good Consequence, as probably it has, of making his Doctrines more respected and better observed ... I shall only add, respecting myself, that having experienced the Goodness of that Being in conducting me prosperously thro’ a long life, I have no doubt of its Continuance in the next, though without the smallest Conceit of meriting such Goodness ...

Letter of Benjamin Franklin, March 9, 1790

Transition

It is never needless to busy ourselves with Jesus.

It is necessary that we examine the Word of Life.

II. Expound the Word of Life. 1:3

The verse begins with a repetition of the phrase “what we have seen and heard.” Indeed “seeing” is emphasized in each of the first 3 verses. However the main verb of the prologue is now introduced: we declare (*NIV*, “proclaim”). We cannot remain silent about this eternal life-giving Word. What we have heard, seen and touched we must share, tell, proclaim and expound. Why? What is it that this eternal life-giving Word provides? John highlights 2.

1. With Jesus you have fellowship.

- 4 times in John’s writings, all in 1:3-7. 19 times in the New Testament, 13 in Paul.
- The word entails a oneness, of a common sharing in something.
- Fellowship is possible only in knowing the Word of Life. Fellowship is with the Father and His Son (deity), Jesus (humanity) Christ (ministry). See 2:23; 2 John 9.
- Fellowship is revealed by our walking in the light and living a life of love.
- Fellowship is essentially the same thing as having eternal life in 1 John. No fellowship, no eternal life. The 2 cannot be separated (1:3 = 5:13). As a community or fellowship of faith, we enjoy a relationship with the Father, His Son and other believers as an aspect of eternal life. This is Christian fellowship.

2. With Jesus you have a family.

- With the Father and with His Son – emp. their equality as well as their distinctiveness. One is Father, the other is Son. This is a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity.
- John had learned to call God “Father” from the lips of Jesus. God was not known as a Father in the Old Testament except in a very limited sense. Israel did not really address Him, honor Him or know Him as Father. Indeed, to think of God as Father is totally foreign to almost all the religions of the world except Christianity. Here our Savior, our Lord, taught us we could call our God our Father. He is a Father who is good, gracious and great. He is loving and kind, merciful and gentle, available and approachable. He is a perfect heavenly Father.
- **When you receive the Son as your Savior you get God as your Father. You also get a whole bunch of brothers and sisters as well.

Transition

Examine the Word of Life. Expound the Word of Life.

III. Enjoy the Word of Life. 1:4

- the 1st of the 4 purpose statements.
- Our joy is better than “your” joy. John has in view his and their joy (as a pastor for his people). Indeed there can be no “our” joy without “your” joy.
- These things – looks to 1:3, but does not exclude 1:5-5:21.
- John is echoing the words of Jesus.
John 15:11 – “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”
John 16:24 – “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”
- There is a joy that is ours resulting from fellowship with the apostles’ testimony and fellowship with the Father and the Son.
- Indeed the Bible is filled with admonitions to enjoy. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” What are some aspects of that joy we should experience?

1. Enjoy Salvation.

Psalm 51:12 – “Restore to me the *joy* of Your *salvation*, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.”

Habakkuk 3:18 – “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will *joy* in the God of my *salvation*.”

2. Enjoy the Scriptures.

Jeremiah 15:16 – “Your words were found, and I ate them, And *Your word* was to me the *joy and rejoicing* of my heart.”

3. Enjoy His Strength.

Nehemiah 8:10 – “Then he said to them ‘Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the *joy* of the Lord is your *strength*.”

4. Enjoy Services.

Psalm 100:2 – “*Serve* the Lord with *gladness*; Come before His presence with singing.”

5. Enjoy the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 – “But the fruit of the *Spirit* is love, *joy*, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.”

1 Thessalonians 1:6 – “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with *joy* of *the Holy Spirit*.”

6. Enjoy Soulwinning.

Psalm 126:5 – “Those who *sow* in tears shall reap in *joy*.”

7. Enjoy Suffering.

Acts 5:41 – “So they departed from the presence of the council, *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to *suffer* shame for His name.”

James 1:2-3 – “My brethren count it all *joy* when you fall into various kinds of *trials*, knowing that the *testing of your faith* produces patience.”

8. Enjoy Sharing.

1 John 1:4 – “And these things we write to you that our *joy* may be full.”

Conclusion

- Jaroslav Pelikan, Professor of History at Yale University, author of *Jesus Through the Centuries*, says, “There was a great teacher, and gathered around him was a small group of faithful followers. They listened to his message and were transformed by it. But the message alienated the power structure of his time, which finally put him to death but did not succeed in eradicating his message, which is stronger now than ever. That description would apply equally to Jesus and Socrates. But nobody’s ever built a cathedral in honor of Socrates. Socrates called upon people to think straight, but with Jesus there’s more than just “teaching,” there’s a transcendent dimension, beyond the here and now, as a source of hope and meaning.”
- The great English Reformer, John Knox, adds, “No one else holds or has held the place in the heart of the world which Jesus holds. Other gods have been devoutly worshipped; no other man has been so devoutly loved.”
- What a Life! What a Savior! What a Fellowship! What a Joy Divine!